

Rec. 14. 11. 05
9/2/208/0002

University
of the Witwatersrand,
Johannesburg



School of Geography, Archaeology and Environmental Studies

Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa Enquiries: GEOGRAPHY: TEL: +27 11 717-6503 • Fax: +27 11 403-7281
ARCHAEOLOGY: TEL: +27 11 717-6045 • Fax: +27 11 339-1620

Report to the South African Heritage Resource Agency
Concerning excavation permit
No 80/05/04/014/51

Mamaetla
Test excavation of site GS8 (Gallashiels)
E 28.52.10/S23.14.03

Principal Investigator
Dr Karim Sadr
School of Geography, Archaeology
& Environmental Studies
Wits University
Private Bag 3
Wits 2050
Email: sadrk@geoarc.wits.ac.za

10 November 2005

In July 2005 a team of archaeologists from Wits University excavated a rock shelter known as Mamaetla ¹(GS8, on farm Gallashiels). The site, which was kindly brought to the attention of the principal investigator by Mr Edward B. Eastwood of Palaeo-Art Field Services, is located on the Makgabeng plateau in the Limpopo Province of South Africa.

There are many rock paintings in the Mamaetla shelter, among which a possible sheep is of great interest to this project. The site promises to shed light on two key issues concerning the Neolithic of southern Africa: when did sheep reach this part of the sub-continent and how did they get there?

A one and a half by one meter test trench was excavated in the center of the wide but shallow shelter, reaching bedrock at an average depth of 15-20 (Fig. 1). Each meter square meter was dug in 16 separate quads of 25 x 25 cm in area, and on average about 3 cm thick. This is a method which has been used successfully by the principal investigator in other rock shelters in southern Africa, and is adopted from a standard excavation method used in the central Karoo by Garth Sampson and his research team.

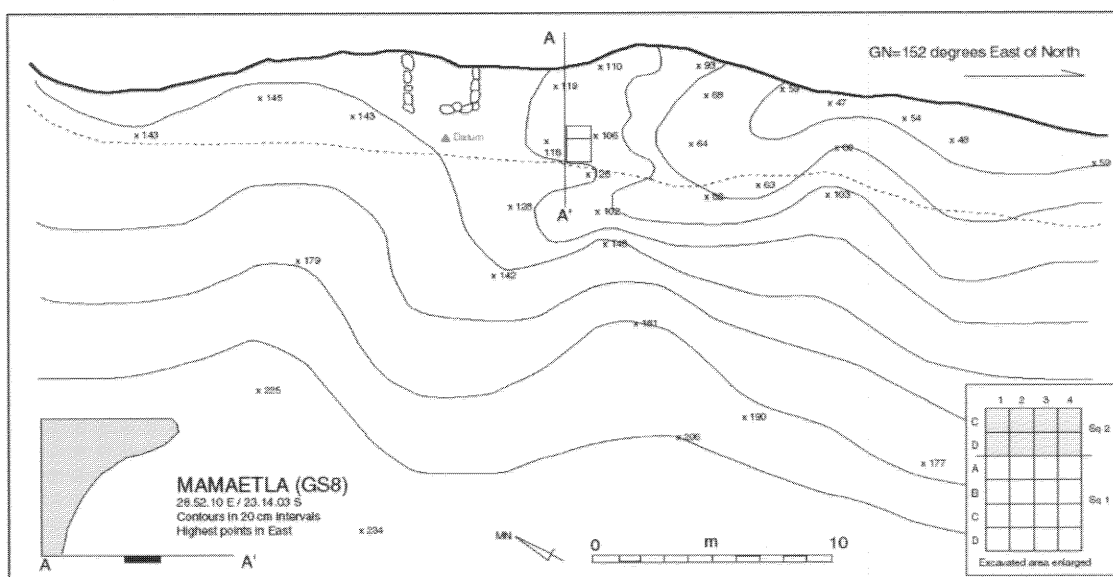


Fig 1. Mamaetla, showing position of excavated pit.

Although visible natural stratigraphy was limited to an ash lens in square 2, the distribution of finds, especially lithics and ceramics, suggest two main archaeological layers (Fig. 2). The upper layer contained very little material including potsherds, pieces of clay figurines, metal slag, very little bone and macro botanical remains, and a quantity of charcoal. The lower layer contains only a few potsherds. Here, flaked stones are more numerous. Metal slag also occurs in these lower spits.

¹ The excavation at Mamaetla was funded by a Focus Area grant from the National Research Foundation (FA2004041300026).

Mamaetla: the distribution of finds

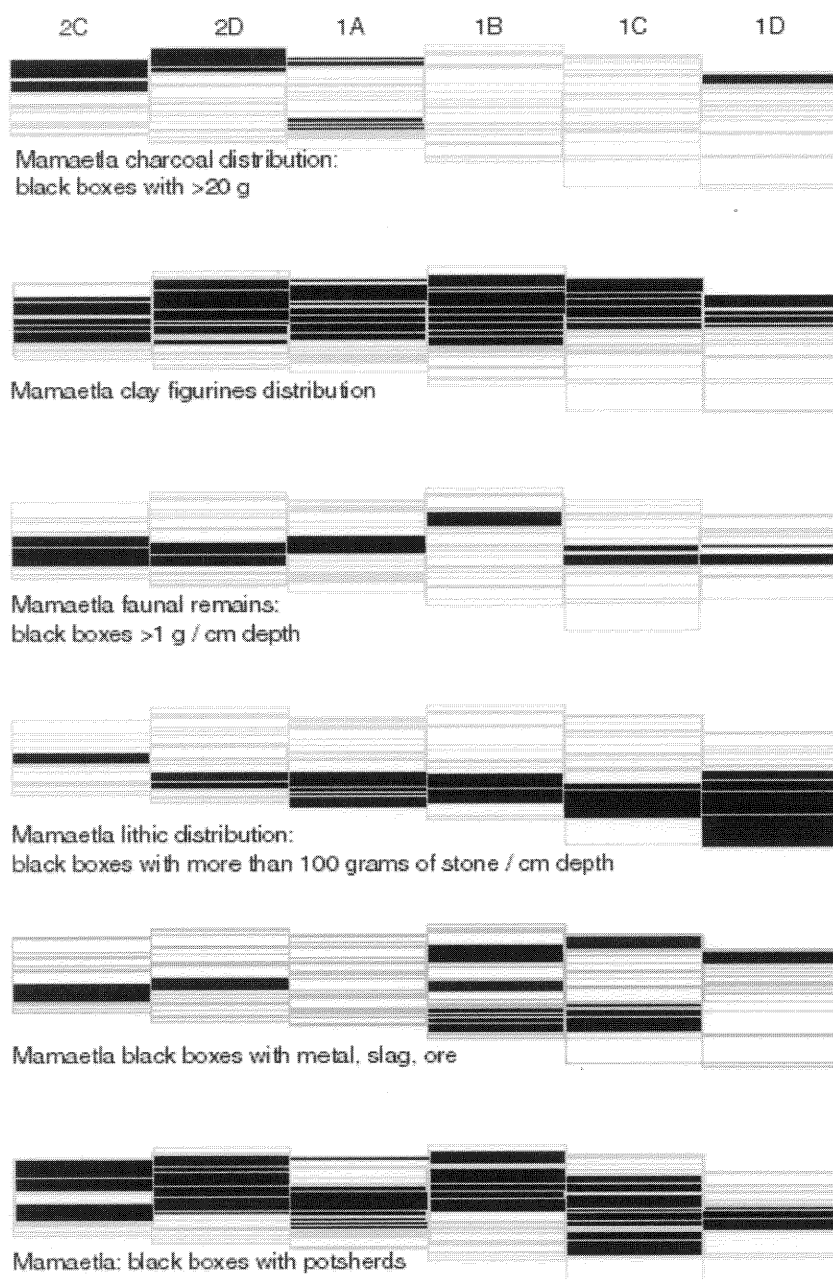


Fig 2. The distribution of finds in the Mamaetla section.

The animal bones were kindly identified by Dr Job Kibii (Table 1). Most of the bones are from small mammals, including bovids. There were three ostrich eggshell beads, two of them tiny with diameters of less than 5mm. Three tiny glass beads were found in the uppermost two layers.

Square	Quad	Spit	Element	Quantity	Side	Portion	Description
MM1	D1	1	Carapace	1		fragment	Tortoise
MM1	C3	1	Metacarpal IV	1	R	proximal	small mammal
MM1	C2	2	Enamel	4		fragment	Bovid
MM1	C1	3	Shell	1		fragment	Snail
MM2	D1	5	Carapace	1		fragment	Tortoise
MM1	C4	3	Rib	5		shaft	small mammal
MM1	C4	3	Rib	2		shaft	Micromammal
MM1	C2	3	Enamel	3		fragment	Bovid
MM1	C1	1	Enamel	1		fragment	Bovid
			Lower			almost	
MM2	D3	5	Premolar	1	R	complete	Lagomorph
MM1	A4	3	Radius	1	R	proximal	Lagomorph
MM1	B4	2	Humerus	1	L	distal	Lagomorph
MM1	B1	2	Enamel	1		fragment	Bovid
MM1	B4	4	Jaw	1		fragment	small mammal
MM1	B4	3	Rib	1		shaft	small mammal
MM1	B1	3	Maxilla	1		fragment	Lizard
MM1	A1	4	Maxilla	1		fragment	Lizard
MM1	A1	4	Mandible	2		fragment	Lizard
MM1	A3	3	Humerus	1		shaft	small mammal
MM1	A3	3	Enamel	2		fragment	Bovid
MM1	A4	3	Ulna	1	R	proximal	Lagomorph
MM2	D2	4	Enamel	1		fragment	Bovid
MM2	D1	5	Enamel	1		fragment	Bovid
							Bovid Size
MM2	D2	4	Rib	1		shaft	class I
MM2	D3	5	Enamel	1		fragment	Bovid
						almost	
MM2	D4	3	1st Phalanx	1		complete	small bird
			Distal				Bovid Size
MM2	D4	3	Sesamoid	1		whole	class II
							Bovid Size
MM2	D2	4	1st Incisor	1		whole	class II
						almost	Bovid Size
MM2	D1	5	3rd Phalanx	1	R	complete	class I
							Bovid Size
MM2	D1	4	Metapodial	1		condyle	class I
MM2	D1	4	Radius	1	L	proximal	Lagomorph
MM2	C3	4	Enamel	11		fragment	Bovid
MM2	C3	4	Shell	2		fragment	Snail
MM2	C2	3	Enamel	2		fragment	Bovid
MM2	C2	5	Enamel	1		fragment	Bovid
MM2	C2	4	Enamel	1		fragment	Bovid
MM2	C1	3	Rib	1		shaft	small mammal

Analysed by Job Kibii, October 2005

Table 1. The faunal remains from Mamaetla